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ABSTRACT

The Building College and Community Services for Single Parents and Displaced Homemakers Project at Austin Community College (Texas) successfully achieved its goals for Project Year 1994-95. Formative and summative methods of evaluation show that the project accomplished the following: developed cooperative linkages with more than 12 businesses and community organizations; actively recruited more than 1,200 displaced homemakers and single parents, with more than 212 enrolling in vocational and technical education; effectively retained disadvantaged students through training and support services; and assisted in the school-to-work transition of graduating project participants. During the year, the project provided support services to 586 enrolled students who were single parents and displaced homemakers, with 90 of them receiving financial assistance to defray the cost of dependent care or textbooks and supplies. For the 82 students who received financial assistance from the project during fall and spring semesters, the average earned grade point average was 3.1 and 89 percent were retained through spring or summer. The project also provided assistance to 381 prospective single parent students through career and educational planning or resource information. Students were highly satisfied with the services provided by the program. The program was also successful in helping students access alternative means of financial and other types of aid. For the coming year, the project internally plans to place more emphasis on proactive interventions to improve completion rate of participants. Externally, the project recommends that grant funds continue to be made available to single parent programs that support vocational and technical education and that these grants be multiyear. (KC)

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ED 395 167

PY95 Final Detailed Report
Discretionary Equity Grant
Austin Community College:

BUILDING COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES FOR SINGLE PARENTS AND DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS

August 15, 1995

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

LINKAGE DEVELOPMENT 3

RECRUITMENT 5

RETENTION 7

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION 9

PROJECT EVALUATION 10

LOOKING AHEAD 12

BUILDING COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES
FOR SINGLE PARENTS AND DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS
Austin Community College
PROJECT YEAR END REPORT 1994-95

INTRODUCTION

The Building College and Community Services for Single Parents and Displaced Homemakers Project at Austin Community College successfully achieved its goals for Project Year 1994-95. The Project **developed cooperative linkages** with more than 12 business and community organizations, **actively recruited** over 1200 displaced homemakers and single parents with more than 212 enrolling in vocational/technical education, **effectively retained** disadvantaged students through training and support services, and **assisted in the school-to-work transition** of graduating Project participants. The Project received acknowledgements for services rendered to the community from the Texas Department of Human Services, Travis County Housing Authority, Caritas, and the Austin-Travis County Private Industry Council.

During the year, the Project **provided support services to 586 enrolled students who were single parents and displaced homemakers** with 90 of these receiving financial assistance to defray the cost of dependent care or textbooks/supplies. For the 82 students who received financial assistance from the project during fall and spring semesters, the **average earned GPA was 3.1 and 89% were retained through spring or summer**. The Project also **provided assistance to 381 prospective single parent students** through career and educational planning or resource information.

To ensure that single parents and displaced homemakers received the assistance needed to access college, prepare for the skilled workforce, and achieve the goal of self-sufficiency, the Project outlined in the original grant proposal specific actions it planned to undertake during Project Year 1994-95. The four Project objectives of linkage development, recruitment, retention, and school-to-work transition and the activities that led to their achievement are detailed on the following pages. The report concludes with an evaluation of the Project and a commentary focused on the future.

LINKAGE DEVELOPMENT

The Project continued an Advisory Committee of diverse membership to receive input from business and industry and facilitate interagency cooperation. The Advisory Committee met as a whole two times during the year to provide guidance and review Project activities. The four subcommittees, Resource Development, Communications and Marketing, Mentoring and Gender Equity, and Agency Linkage, met as needed to address subcommittee objectives. The Communications Subcommittee issued press releases, published a Speakers' Bureau brochure, and developed a script for public service announcements. The Agency Linkage Subcommittee developed a presentation for agency boards stressing the need for continued coordination of joint agency efforts and institutional funding support for the Project.

The Project Director, Sherry Morris, maintained associate membership in the Tech-Prep Consortium and the Capital Area Workforce Alliance to acquire up-to-date information regarding the area labor market and facilitate cooperative endeavors in technical/vocational training. Ms. Morris continued to serve as a Mayoral appointee on the Program Coordinating Committee of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program of the Housing Authority of Austin. She was also an active member of the Austin-Travis County Workforce Development Board Planning Team, which provided strategic planning for the implementation of House Bill 642. This Texas bill and impending federal legislation seek to develop a needs-based, efficient, and coordinated job training and social services network to meet future workforce needs. Ms. Morris' **participation in these endeavors strengthened the community's understanding of the needs of single parents and displaced homemakers, the importance of vocational/technical education, and the value of Austin Community College**.

To improve coordination of services, the Project met with representatives of more than 12 agencies including Texas Department of Human Services, Texas Employment Commission, Central Texas Mutual Housing Association, Rural Capital Area Private Industry Council, Austin-Travis County Private Industry Council, Travis County Housing Authority, American Learning Institute, Austin Families, and the Housing Authority of Austin. Contacts were also made with Caritas, HOBO, Capital Area Foodbank, the Center for Battered Women, and other emergency service agencies. One notable outcome of a newly developed relationship with the City of Austin Early Childhood Services was the opportunity to explore the possibility of a joint pilot project to secure additional day care funding for single parent participants in Family Self-Sufficiency programs.

A **successful Forging Partnerships Conference sponsored by the Project attracted 86 attendees** from a wide variety of area agencies focusing on the theme Partnering for Self-Sufficiency. Travis County Judge Bill Aleshire spoke of the perils and promises of collaboration and ACC President Bill Segura discussed the role of the

community college in self-sufficiency partnerships. Much of the program was experiential with participants actively involved in brainstorming to identify new areas for collaboration and new strategies for partnering. Partipants were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to interact with one another in new ways and to develop drafts of partnership possibilities at the grass roots level.

Linkages were also made by the Project with such educational organizations as area independent school districts, TEA Region XIII Service Center, El Paso Community College, University of Texas, Southwest Texas State University, area proprietary schools, and numerous local high schools including alternative schools. These and other contacts with the Capital Area Tech Prep Consortium and ACC Adult Education were designed to enhance understanding of vocational/technical education and to facilitate attainment of educational and career goals for single parent students.

The Project also coordinated services with other Perkins' providers at Austin Community College through participation in the Special Populations Planning Committee. Additionally, the Project met monthly with student development personnel involved with services to Sex Equity and Disadvantaged students to promote ease of student access to services, coordinate financial and staff resources, plan joint recruitment and linkage efforts, and share expertise and information.

Throughout the year, groundwork was laid for future cooperative endeavors with business and industry such as mentoring programs, scholarships, and workshop presentations. Personnel from Texas Instruments, KLBJ-AM Radio, and Beaman Metals were particularly supportive of Project activities.

RECRUITMENT

As detailed below, the Project used a wide variety of methods to recruit single parents and displaced homemakers to technical/vocational training. Over **381 direct, person-to-person contacts were made with prospective single parent students; indirect contacts through publicity and third party information through agency contact reached over 900 others.** While the methods used were time-honored, tried-and-true recruitment techniques, it is difficult to provide an outcome measure of the number of these contacts who actually enrolled as new students at Austin Community College. Referrals to technical/vocational education generated by our information outreach may not have been made directly to the Project, and publicity activities may have attracted students to the college who then did not seek the additional support services of this specific Project. It is also likely that the heightened technical/vocational awareness created by the outreach activities will result in increasing single parent student enrollment over several semesters to come.

What can be stated with assurance is that of the 82 students who received Project financial assistance to defray the costs of textbooks and/or dependent care in fall and spring, 34 (42%) were new students. Using this factor, it can be extrapolated that 246 of the 586 eligible students who received direct services from the Project were newly recruited students. The Project fully expects the recruitment methods described below to continue to attract single parents and displaced homemakers to technical/vocational training in increasing numbers in the semesters ahead.

Contacts with Agencies

The contacts made with local agencies to build linkages and develop coordination served the additional purpose of promoting recruitment. Staff and caseworkers from more than **12 local agencies made over 138 direct referrals to the Project**. They also served as an outlet for information about the benefits of technical/vocational education. Because many of these agencies routinely provide information to their clients about the Project, it is certain that many of the prospective students who initiated contact with the Project during the year did so as a direct result of their involvement with these agencies. The agencies that made the greatest number of known referrals included Texas Department of Human Services (especially the JOBS program), Adult Career Exploration Services, and local GED programs. The Housing Authority of the City of Austin sent 35 and the Travis County Housing Authority sent 38 of their Family Self-Sufficiency clients to the Project for career and educational planning and enrollment assistance. The continued participation of these clients in their family self-sufficiency projects is contingent upon their on-going progress in achieving their educational and training goals at ACC.

Presentations

In addition to informational contacts with agency staff, the Project made presentations directly to several groups of clients who were prospective students. The Project met with members of ACC GED classes, TDHS Life Skills classes, New Student Orientations, and area high schools and teen parent programs and participated in the Tele-Orientation on the ACC Access channel. Class visits were made to more than 15 Parallel Studies classes. These presentations provided information about technical education and support services as well as career planning and transition to college.

Publicity

The Project distributed over 500 brochures to assist recruitment. Both brochures described Project services of career, educational, and personal counseling, financial assistance, and community referrals and touted technical/vocational education, but each addressed different audiences. Breaking Barriers targeted single parents by focusing on ways to overcome barriers. Making Transitions targeted displaced homemakers by emphasizing the opportunities that situational transitions can present.

Publicity about technical/vocational education and/or the Project appeared in the American Statesman and college newspapers directed to students, faculty, and staff. Additional publicity was generated through the Project newsletter which was sent to faculty and the student mailing list. The college schedule of classes and the ACC Catalog carried Project information in highlighted sections. Technical faculty received special flyers to alert them to the needs of single parents and displaced homemakers and to the resources available to them. A brochure touting the Project Speakers' Bureau was mailed to over 50 local clubs and organizations, and public service announcements were developed for television and radio. Campus postings highlighted information sessions as well as special projects and presentations.

Workshops

"My Turn Now" was offered four times during the year to attract and assist women considering returing to college. "I Did It, You Can Too!" - a student panel that shared experiences in overcoming obstacles to returning to school and staying in technical/vocational education - was offered twice. The Project also sponsored 6 "Breaking Barriers" and 2 "Making Transitions" workshops. Over 96% of the 88 workshop participants rated the experience as very beneficial.

Information sessions about project purposes and services were held twice a month at the Riverside and Northridge campuses. Throughout the year **217 single parents and displaced homemakers attended** one of these sessions and completed the initial intake process.

RETENTION

The Project provided a variety of support services to promote the retention of single parents and displaced homemakers in technical/vocational education. The Project counted **586 eligible enrolled students who availed themselves of one or more of the services** described below.

Of particular note is the retention and progress of the Project participants who received financial assistance with day care and textbooks this year. The 82 students who received assistance through May 15, 1995 earned an **average GPA of 3.1 on an average of 34 earned credit hours**. They **passed 96% of the classes** in which they received grades and completed with a grade 78% of the classes they attempted. At the end of Spring '95, 96% were making satisfactory progress and 96% were in good academic standing with 4 receiving honors designations. **Eighty-nine (89%)of these students were retained** through the end of Spring or into the Summer semester and 2 students graduated.

Individual and Group Counseling

Over **342 students received career, educational, and/or personal counseling** to assist them in clarifying and setting goals, problem-solving, and monitoring progress. These services were available during day and evening hours and by appointment and on a walk-in basis. The Project also sponsored support groups for single parents and for "late bloomers."

Financial Assistance

The Project provided **financial assistance to 90** eligible and needy single parents and displaced homemakers to defray the cost of dependent care and/or textbooks. An additional 46 others received assistance through Perkins formula dollars. Each participant had a least one counseling session in which a plan for educational, career, and personal success was discussed. Forty-five percent of these participants had over 4 counseling sessions while fifteen percent exceeded 8. Outreach and monitoring efforts encouraged participants, assisted them in staying on track, and provided timely interventions.

Workshops

Over **34 free workshops** were offered to provide single parents and displaced homemakers with the skills needed to select a satisfying career, write resumes and mount effective job searches, communicate effectively and assertively, improve self-esteem, develop effective learning strategies and methods, and improve problem-solving, self-management, and coping abilities. Two on-going counseling groups provided additional support and encouragement for these special populations.

Access to Community Services

The Project made more than **212 referrals to community agencies** such as TDHS and the JOBS program, TEC, CCMS, Legal Aid, the People's Community Clinic, HOBO, and Caritas among others. The Project worked closely with area housing authorities to identify candidates for their family self-sufficiency programs.

Twenty-two different handouts providing information on area resources were developed or updated and prominently displayed on each campus. Community services such as low cost medical, legal, housing, food, and utilities assistance were highlighted as were parenting skills training, affordable day care, and employment assistance information.

Student Newsletter

Each semester the Project published and mailed the newsletter On The Move to interested and prospective students on the mailing list. This publication provided information on Project and community services and resources, career planning and employment, financial assistance for tuition, and news of upcoming workshops and events. Special attention was given to a variety of equity issues. The newsletter also highlighted the successes of Project participants in special sections, encouraged students to participate in community service activities, and honored those selected to Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and Who's Who.

Educational Materials

A **textbook loan program provided texts for 57 participants** during the year. A lending library made available books, tapes and other materials related to women's issues as well as reference materials on financial aid, support groups, career planning, and academic success. The Project provided various pamphlets, handouts, and resource collections for students. Handouts included information on test-taking skills, time management, parenting concerns, the effects of abusive relationships, and community resources. Informational brochures about area agencies and services were displayed.

Special Projects

The Project instituted a Kids Clothing Closet this year. Donations of clothing were solicited and the Project sponsored a very successful participant clothing exchange day. The Project collaborated with ACC staff and faculty to provide Christmas gifts for needy children of participants as well as holiday food for the families. The Project also formed a partnership with the Austin Jaycees to provide free movie and special events tickets for children and their parents.

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION

The Project worked closely with all Vocational/Technical Divisions to support educational achievement and career attainment for single parents. Direct **contacts were made with 19 departments and 82 faculty members** to facilitate the transition of single parents into their classes and programs as well as to offer assistance in the transition to work.

A substantial portion of funded participants (42%) were new to vocational/technical education. The Project collaborated extensively with faculty to promote their successful navigation into the system, the solidification of career goals, and the development of effective strategies for learning.

The remaining funded participants were predominately A.A.S. degree seekers who began the year with twelve to twenty credit hours. Although substantial academic progress was made, only 2 of these students earned sufficient credits to graduate during the year. However, to assist them with the development of future job-seeking and maintance skills, the Project **sponsored 4 skill-building workshops**, provided labor market information, and participated in Career Emphasis Week. **Individual job search assistance was provided to 19 single parents** who did not receive project financial assistance during the year.

PROJECT EVALUATION

As proposed, the Project used both formative and summative methods of evaluation. The twelve points of evaluation are addressed below:

1. The number of contacts with prospective students and with business/industry, education, and human resource organizations was documented. When rosters or sign-up sheets were impractical, estimates were used. The recruitment activities of the Project reached over 1281 prospective students and more than 12 organizations.

2. Action plans were periodically reviewed with students and revised as necessary to support retention and promote progress. Individaul sessions were held with each funded participant at least once each semester.

3. Academic standing and progress toward a degree was reviewed each semester. Individual student data was used in joint planning with each student and the collective data was analyzed to determine needed programmatic changes.

4. Contacts with SP/DH/SPW students and services provided were documented.

5. The mentoring activity was deleted from the proposal at the time of initial budget and operational format revision.

6. Workshops were evaluated by participants at workshop end. Over 96% of workshop participants rated the experience as very beneficial. Over 40 recruitment and retention workshops were offered.

7. A student evaluation survey was not conducted this year. Anecdotal evidence indicates high satisfaction with services and need for greater funding for day care.

8. The Project Director held monthly evaluation sessions with counselors supporting the Project and 2 meetings with the Advisory Committee. Action plans were developed at each meeting.

9. The Advisory Committee Chair did not conduct an external evaluation of the Project, relying instead on the evaluative data prepared for this report.

10. Retention data was calculated by the Project Director using ACC database information. Eighty-nine percent (89%) of funded participants were retained.

11. Graduation data was researched by the Project Director. The data within one year's span, however, is not pertinent in evaluating the success of the Project. Much more significant is the graduation rate of former participants over time which approaches 45%.

It is important to state that since its inception this Project has been extremely successful in finding additional sources of funding for participants. It is seldom necessary for the Project to provide financial assistance for more than two or three semesters before other provisions such as JOBS or CCMS funding can be made for individuals. As a result, the Project is able to support the day care and textbook needs of a large number of new and/or freshmen students each year rather than supporting the same students through the six or seven semesters typically needed for AAS degree attainment. While this works very well for our participants, it unfortunately produces statistics that do not reflect the significant and successful impact of this Project in terms of graduation during a one year period. For example, during this Project year, 2 funded participants graduated. Since 42% of those who received financial assistance were new students and the majority of the other participants began the year with less than 20 credit hours, this low rate of graduation within the Project year was to be expected. Cumulative Project statistics reflecting that 45% of funded participants have graduated is a more effective measure of impact.

12. The Special Populations Director has added SP/DH/SPW students to the list of special populations to be tracked in terms of Performance Measures developed for other Perkin's populations. ACC is working to improve data collection and update which will result in more accurate outcome data. At the current time, single parent data is captured by self-report on the initial student application and no provisions are made for updating change of status to or from single parent. As a result, the most reliable outcome data is that tracked by the Project itself for its funded participants.

LOOKING AHEAD

By achieving the four objectives established for Project Year 1994-95 of linkage, recruitment, retention, and school to work transition, the Project has made significant movement toward achievement of the long term goal for Perkins Equity Projects. During the past four years this Project has built a strong foundation for future successes, and, providing adequate funding continues to be received for support personnel, critical operating expenses, and costly financial assistance for dependent care and textbooks, these successes can be accelerated in the future. Linkages can be expanded and welded into creative and more effective cooperative endeavors as evidenced by the Project's impending collaboration with the City of Austin to seek Community Block Grant Development funds to supplement Project resources in meeting the day care needs of qualifying students. The heightened awareness of the community about the benefits of technical/vocational education and the resources available to those who pursue it will serve as a stepping stone to increased enrollment. The range and delivery of support services can be improved to promote greater retention and graduation rates.

Internally, the Project plans next year to place more emphasis on proactive interventions to improve completion rate of participants. The Project Director will also work with ACC staff to improve data collection and tracking mechanisms to enhance accurate and timely identification of single parents and incorporate longitudinal tracking of prior participants in research plans.

Externally, the Project recommends that grant funds continue to be made available to single parent programs that support vocational/technical education and that these grants be multi-year. The amount of funding for individual grant proposals should be based on project size and anticipated impact, with special consideration given for prior successful performance. The Project also recommends that Project evaluation criteria be specified and that longitudinal tracking of outcomes over a five year period be required, similar to evaluation procedures in place for TRIO programs through the U.S. Department of Education.

Internal improvements in Project design and administrative support coupled with a foundation of secure, multi-year external funding should improve the success rate of the Project in achieving the promise of Perkins equity funding. Through sensitive response to the needs of this special population, by preserving the best of the past while developing innovative efforts, and through cooperative community endeavors, **this Project has, and can continue to provide significant assistance to our community's single parents and displaced homemakers to assist them to enter the skilled workforce and achieve the goal of self-sufficiency for themselves and their children.**